**Mr.Alaur Rahman**



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Age: 45

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Interviewed by: Jamil Iqbal

Mr. Rahman is one of the leading singers in Britain’s Bengali community. He came to Britain in 1977 when he was just 14 years old and in 1985 appeared on BBC television singing three folk songs. Alaur and his group recorded their first cassette in 1985 and have since made 17 further recordings, either on cassette or CD. By the 1990s Alaur and his group were travelling widely.

**Alaur Rahman**

**Q: How you got interested in music?**
Basically when I came to Britain from Bangladesh, I was quite young and I was missing my country very much and I was very lonely and very homesick. My family accompanied me, but I was still missing my village, missing my hoar, village road, friends and relatives. When I came to this country, (now it is 2006, you are interviewing me), in 1977, London wasn’t that colourful, a totally different atmosphere was prevailing. I entered music because of my loneliness. I was engaged in music back in Bangladesh. I use to go to the madrasa and also the primary school, in the madrasa we use to practice hamd, nath, koshida and other religious song. And in the school we use to sing the songs dedicated to Bangladesh. I was treated differently in the madrasa, and in the school. It was quite interesting.

My father had dream, that I will become a Hafiz, Moulana or Kari; he was a very pious man. I can remember few memories even when I was only four. We use to go to the mosque with bare feet, in the morning in the fog, my father use to call for prayer, and taught me the azan and that azan has come to be my pride as the Ekushe TV has selected me for their azan. Although I am mainly involved with music, but I have little contribution in my religion, I feel proud of that.

**Q: What type of music do you prefer?**
I like spiritual music very much nowadays, and this is related with the age. We have different stages, we have our childhood, we have our youth and we have our later part of our old age. Every thing including the choice changes with the age. There was a time I used to like love song a lot. Now although I do like love songs, but in the same time I like the spiritual songs more. I like Urdu and Hindi gazals including the gazals of Mehdi Hassan and Golam Ali. I also like the Islamic Gazals. The Nazrul songs are also included in the gazals. I like the local music of Sylhet, and the Loko Geeti (folklore) very much. In total, all songs are good, but how much depends on singer’s interest in the song. I am not a good singer but I do try to be. The television will telecast one of my programs soon, it was shown once and now it is being repeated because of the viewer’s request. In the programme I have sung spirituals, nashids, gazals, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, folk, classical and semi classical music. The host Rafiquzzaman asked me, “How did you achieve the skill to sing all these different kinds of songs”? In reply I asked him, “What does one have to do if he wants to sing in a film”? He gave me the answer, “Everything is knowledge, and the greatest knowledge of all is the knowledge of the Creator, if he likes you and you try, you will be successful person”.

**Q: Who is your role model?**
I follow Mohammed Rafi very much, I follow him because, he refrained himself from cigarettes, wine, beetle leaf and drugs. I was not lucky enough to see him but I have heard it from many people. The second thing is, to me his voice is absolutely God given. There are many better singers like Mehdi Hassan, Lata, and others, but he is special to me. And he was pious, so I try to follow him truly in all and I am still following him accordingly. He used to practice the songs deep at night and busy all day recording film songs. I have found many talents in the artist. He sang spiritual songs, gazals, film songs and also bojon with great success. He was a very good singer of Bengali, Punjabi and Urdu folk songs. He even sang English songs. So I am basically the follower of Rafi.

**Q: Tell us about your teacher here in Britain who trained you in this field.**
My teacher was Pandit Haridas Ganguly, he was from West Bengal, he and his wife were homeopathic doctors. Pandit Haridas Ganguly was a student of Golam Ali, whose name and fame is history now. My eldest uncle Abdul Goni introduced me to him. Golam Ali was the great singer and teacher in 1950s and 1960s. I was a student of Pandit Horidas Ganguly, and I have learned music from him.

**Q: How did you become involved in the music here in Britain? Which song of yours was the first hit?**
In 1985, I had performed in BBC1, Krishon Gould was sponsored of the programme and he offered me to sing in the television. I was so happy and I said, “Why not”? In the first television programme I sang a song of Nazrul, one song of my own and one song of my uncle. The programme’s name was “Naya Zindegi, Naya Jibon”. BBC1 used to play Asian music from Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi to all types of music, each week they used to broadcast different music. I performed in that programme and the Bengali community supported me very much. In that programme I told, “I am fond of Brick Lane area”. The community people were very proud of me and I was supported by them very much. I used to have programme almost everyday. Mr Moshahid Ali was my first promoter; he had a shop in Brick Lane, named Jhanker Music House. He requested me to sing some old songs, but I preferred to sing my own songs, so that I have my own product and my own identity. I recorded 12 songs in one night, the entire tune was set by me, and the songs were of old age and some Indian and Pakistani musician supported me. In those days some funfair was here in Britain. And my promoter Mr Moshahid Ali advertised the cassette in those fairs. People were very interested to buy the cassette. I went to Bangladesh soon after the release of the cassette album; and people were looking for me as the cassette was a huge hit in the Brick Lane area and especially in the Bengali community. I was in Bangladesh at that time and I got a copy in Bangladesh and I also liked it. Some prominent figures of this field in Bangladesh appreciated my music. One of my close friends informed me of the cassette from Comilla, all these made me happy. I remember some of the songs of that cassette till now.
There were 12 songs, those all were very popular at that time. Even today people request me to sing those songs from the first album. I have 36 albums including Hindi and Bangla songs. I have four albums in the pipeline.

**Q: What do you think of remixing of the music? Do you think the introduction of new musical instruments is spoiling the music itself, some says that the spirit of the music is lost?**
I do agree that the spirit is not there, it is being modified. But there is a saying, “Days are not always the same, today’s king will be tomorrow’s beggar” it is a quotation of Nazrul, and Nowshad.
If I have everything fulfilled, why should I borrow from others? Every thing has a good side and a bad side. I am not in favour of the change, but people are still listening to the Bengali songs, they are listening to Bengali and later they will be interested to go deeper in the songs, and they will try to find out the origin of the Bengali language. They will search and find many things; they will know the language movement, know the liberation war and so many things, which they do not know. I am not against the change, because the new generation is listening to Bengali at least. And this is the achievement of this changing.

**Q: Do you have special fascination fort any of the musical instruments?**
I find Harmonium the most useful, because it helps us to understand the grammar of the song. In the past people used to practice music with tanpura and harmonium has made it easier. Among the musical instruments I like the violin, though it is a western musical instrument. sitar, saringi and dotara are natural instruments, these gives a true feeling. The acoustic instruments give the true feelings. The music created ten years back; the same thing is being edited by the modern technology. That is why there is no spirit in the modern day music. They can’t create the true feeling and the spirit of the music. There is no soul and the music seems to miss something. The next thing is that many of the artists don’t practice enough. Those who come to spot light too soon, are lost soon too. But he, who becomes popular slowly, will hold his position for long and will loose his popularity very slowly. There is no one who can forget Lata, Mukesh, Kishore and Golam Ali. Some of them have passed away before our age, but we still talk and love them because we have got pure and original spirit of music from them. They are like symbols to us we can never forget them.

**Q: Who were your contemporary singers in the 70s, when you were a student of music?**
Mr Rajib (he is a councillor now) was there with me, and maybe Mr Faruk and some other singers and friends I had in the 70s. They were good friends of mine and some other persons were there who had a better learning ability than me. They could not continue but they had good knowledge about classical music. The commercial music is a totally different thing. Another point is the voice, which is absolutely God gifted. For example you can see the legendary Abdul Alim another one is Mahmuddun Nabi, we have got many very good quality singers but no one can be compared with them. They had practiced on and on and on, but the God gifted voice and tune favoured them very much undoubtedly.

**Q: Have you performed in Bangladesh, in the television or in other media?**
I have performed on Bangladesh TV (BTV). In Bangladesh in my Jogannathpur Thana, they have a big group, who once gave me a huge reception in 1986. Recently I opened the memorandum they gave me in that programme, and I broke into tears. I have not done anything special, but still they congratulated me so much. I have a programme with Satya Saha (the music director) in BTV. I am proud of being with Mehdi Hassan, Golam Ali, Jagjit Singh and other great singers of the subcontinent. I have learned so much from them.
Music is a pure entertainment; those who have a pure soul can never go off track, music will guide them all their life.

**Q: What is your comment on the young generation of musicians in and from Bangladesh?**
They have bright future if they continue to work hard and stick to the music. Hard work contributes the most behind everything. Everyone have to have a target, one will have to dream for the success in life. You will have to look way beyond the possibility and then you will have to work hard than you will achieve the impossible. Another thing is that one will have to enjoy his job. If one doesn’t enjoy his duty, than he will never be successful. In any part of life one cannot be successful if he does not commit one hundred percent.

**Q: Do you see bright future in any of the new generation singers, can you name one or two?**
We have many bright singers in our community, I do have some programmes with them but I cannot name them. We spend very little time together so I cannot remember their name. We have them all over Britain; they are more interested with folk music. They are interested because they find their root in the folk songs.
Many of the other young singers have the potential to become great, they have the interest in music. I am making a new album, and some of them have become interested listening to those.

**Q: Please tell us, how many of you were there who used to practice music, back in 70s?**
There was Mr Salique of Dishari and Mr Akkas and some other nearly 8 to 10 people who use to sing in the programmes. There were no new faces found in the programmes in those days. Nowadays there are many artists, but they need to improve their quality.

**Q: Please tell us something about the community.**
We have many achievements in our community here in Britain. We have many potential and bright people in our community in East London. We have to have unity among us. In case of education, our community performance is excellent. We did not have good record in education till 1985, but nowadays the performance and record of the schools of this area is tremendous. We have very bright future ahead but we need to be united in the community on national issues.

**Q: Can you remember any of your performance that made you proud?**
Some 3 or 4 years back, Bangla TV organised the Brick Lane Festival. Andrew Kishore, Sabina Yasmin and many other artists from Bangladesh were invited and I was also there. Liala Banu was the presenter of the programme, and I was singing the song, “I am a Bengali boy, singing the song of Bangladesh, the delta of Surma and Kushiara is my birthplace, I sing song of Bangladesh”, there were probably 1800 to 2000 people in the audience. The crowd was dancing, and I can still see the scene when I close my eyes. I also have so many awards and crests; I thank Allah for everything I got.